

THE CATHOLIC RADICAL

"...to foster a society based on creed instead of greed." Peter Maurin

February/March 2021

Price: For whatever it's worth.

Indigenous Wisdom

by Patrick Tam

Living among the Yup'ik Eskimo people of western Alaska for more than 35 years, I have learned two essential lessons from them: Be thankful for all we have been given. Be always aware that everything is connected. This Indigenous wisdom provides a framework for understanding climate change as it is unfolding in the Arctic. The signs of global warming have been especially dramatic in the earth's polar regions. This summer (2020) saw Arctic temperatures soar to 100 degrees Fahrenheit in Siberia. The steady loss of sea ice and the melting of glaciers at both poles have been alarming scientists around the world. Alaska's wildfire season has been stretching longer year after year, with the fires increasing in frequency and intensity. According to the Environmental Defense Fund, Alaska has been warming twice as fast as the rest of the country. Annual temperatures have risen 3 degrees Fahrenheit while the average winter temperatures have gone up by an average of 6 degrees Fahrenheit.

Scientists have been sounding the alarm that the polar regions will feel the greatest impact from global warming. And yet the response of our political leaders has been anything but urgent. From Alaskan governor Sarah Palin's chant of "Drill, baby, drill!" at the 2008 Republican National Convention to the denialism of climate change by Trump and his supporters, there has been a concerted effort to stifle any serious discussion and action to address global warming. If anything, the effort has been to expand extractive industries like drilling and mining. An example is the law

signed by Trump in 2017 allowing oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Drilling activities will have a negative impact on the environmentally sensitive area which is home to the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Caribou



provides the resource that has allowed the Indigenous Gwich'in and Iñupiat peoples to survive in this region for thousands of years. Any threat to the herd would disrupt these cultures and communities.

It is no secret that the state of Alaska shares a cozy bed with the oil and gas industries. The official Alaska website says the oil and gas industry is the largest component of Alaska's economy. Nearly 85 percent of the state budget is supplied by oil revenues. One consequence of this dependence on the oil and gas industries is that Alaskan Native communities are forced to choose between allowing drilling and its possible risks to take place on their lands or continue their traditional subsistence life in rural areas with high unemployment and few economic opportunities. The bottom line is that Alaska is in no hurry to wean the world from fossil fuels.

Every year the data confirms that the pace of global warming is accelerating.

(Continued on Page 2)

Pacifism

by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

Back in 1965, when I first heard Jesus' hard sayings at Mass: **Love your enemies. Take nothing for the journey. Turn the other cheek. Whatever you do to the least, you do to me. Fear is useless, what is needed is trust. Take up the cross and follow me.** — I was intrigued by their nonconformist, counter-cultural, and counter-logical nature. That curiosity turned into admiration as I learned Jesus had not only advised others to follow these words, but did so himself, at the cost of his own life. I saw the cross as a torture device transformed into a symbol of profound nonviolence. That every Catholic liturgy opens and closes with the sign of the cross and every church prominently displays a crucifix convinced me of its centrality. My intellectual devotion to these ideals grew through listening to Scripture and good homilies. I could not help but notice how often the word "peace" appeared during Mass— "Peace be with you" at the opening and "Go in peace" at the end with many other references in between, including prayers for world peace and, prior to COVID, to physical sign of peace offered to others in the congregation.

I didn't see pacifism as sentimental about human nature. The crucifix kept my feet on the ground, and the prayer asking God to forgive sins "in my thoughts and deeds, for what I have done and what I have failed to do" reminded me that holiness had to be earned by hard work and honest self-criticism. Salvation was not being passed out like trinkets from clowns at the circus. In the Lord's Prayer, Mass-goers dare to ask God only for as much forgiveness as they offer to others. Watching the Body of Christ broken and Blood poured out on the altar in order

(Continued on Page 4)

Wisdom

(Continued from Page 1)

Living in a Yup'ik Eskimo community at the mouth of the Yukon River, I have seen firsthand the changes in the environment. The people here still live a largely subsistence life, harvesting what they need from the land, rivers, and the sea by hunting, fishing, and gathering. The diet is made up of salmon, whitefish, wild migrating waterfowl, moose, seals, beluga whales, and berries and greens from the tundra. The yearly subsistence cycle is divided between freeze-up (when the rivers and lakes freeze enough for safe travel) and break-up (when the winter ice becomes unsafe and travel by boat is possible). Freeze-up used to begin around mid-October but now it begins in mid-November so that safe travel on the ice is often not possible till December. Break-up used to take place around late May or early June but now takes place in mid-May.

The timing of freeze-up and break-up are important in allowing people to do their subsistence harvesting of resources.

Alaskan Natives have a deep, ancient connection with the land. Their ability to survive and thrive in this environment depends on their practical knowledge of the land. Elders are respected because their experiential knowledge is passed on to younger generations. This collective wisdom is valuable in allowing people to prepare ahead of time from season to season. But many people now say the land has become inconsistent and unpredictable. Weather patterns, for example, now seem to act in erratic ways. The migration patterns of animals have changed. New species appear as climate warms. The result is that life can become more dangerous when the thickness of the ice is inconsistent or storms form at unexpected times.

The accelerated warming of the Arctic has made some Alaskan Natives "climate change refugees." Erosion, flooding, and permafrost thaw are threatening entire communities. Erosion was named by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 2009 as the main threat to 178 Alaskan communities, mostly located on Alaska's western

coast. The Corps in 2019 added flooding and permafrost thaw as threats. More communities (including the one in which I live) have also been added to the Corp's list. Village communities under such threats must wrestle over two difficult and costly



options—stay and try to deal with the damage, or relocate an entire community. These small rural communities are often struggling for economic resources already.

When I first came and lived among Yup'ik people, some elders would tell me that when they were children, their elders told them that one day the world would change and the weather will change too. They used a Yup'ik saying that translates to "The world is changing following the people." In the Yup'ik world everything is connected, everything is bound in a web of relationships—the living with the dead, the people and the land, the people with

each other. There is a moral dimension in the people's intimate connection to the land just as there is a moral dimension in our human relationships with each other. When human interpersonal relationships are no longer healthy, the relationship with the land will also suffer. When human beings no longer share compassionately, no longer live humbly, and no longer show gratitude, especially for what the land provides, the spirit of the environment responds appropriately.

To see the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic simply as climate change refugees is not to see the whole picture. They are, I believe, also the reservoir of an ancient wisdom with practical and spiritual dimensions. Responding to climate change is not just a technical problem because the roots of the crisis are profoundly spiritual. In this crisis, it might be time to acknowledge and respect the spiritual depth of Indigenous cultures. Ω

Editor's Note: Patrick Tam holds a BA from Holy Cross College in Worcester and an MA from the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley. The Jesuit Volunteer Corps sent him to work with children and young adults in Emmonak, a small Yup'ik Eskimo village at the mouth of the Yukon River in "bush Alaska." He is the long-time director of the Diocese of Fairbanks' Adult Faith Formation for 23 village parishes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Region, the traditional homeland of the Yup'ik Eskimo people in western Alaska.

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Telephone: (508) 753-3588, 753-3089 Email: theresecw2@gmail.com

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The Youngest 78-Year-Old We Ever Met

by Claire & Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

Barbara Roberts was a mathematician, engineer, peace activist, sailor, and artist. At an age when most people slow down, she climbed Mount Wachusett, took up the ukulele, and with Arthur, her husband of 53 years, sailed the US Eastern seaboard, the coastlands of Europe, and the Mediterranean. Her ever-present smile conveyed her optimism, compassion, and joy. Barbara's sudden death from cancer on December 30 leaves a gaping hole in the lives of everyone who had the good fortune to know her.

In all manner of weather, Barbara and Arthur stood at countless peace vigils, holding signs like "Grandmother for Peace" and "Another Veteran for Peace." They left behind careers at the Pentagon and in the weapons industry to become vital members of the Worcester peace community.

Long before we knew her, Barbara knew of us, the anti-nuclear activists who protested outside her office complex. From 1982-87, she worked at GTE in Westborough, Massachusetts, a facility contracted to develop the Command, Control, and Communications System for the MX, an inter-continental nuclear missile with a destructive capacity 25 times that of the bomb used on Hiroshima. The work gave Barbara nightmares, she told Claire during an interview for the April/May 2007 *Catholic Radical*. In one dream, she was standing at the window on the north side of GTE, looking west towards Worcester. Enormous black clouds were rolling across the whole earth, towards her. "I just knew it was the end of the world," she said.

Those nightmares ended when she left GTE after it closed. She went on to work for Mitre Corporation and was later admitted to Who's Who of Women in Engineering and Science. By 2007, she had returned part-time to her first career of teaching. When Claire asked her how aspiring engineers could avoid the moral dilemmas she had known at GTE, she advised studying ethics and

international relations, and reading widely. "Be politically active," she said. "See movies like *Why We Fight* [a 2006 documentary on the military industrial complex]. Most people feel you should defend your country, but you don't want to be hoodwinked into believing something that isn't true."



Barbara opposed the Iraq War and worried the US might use tactical nuclear weapons in Iran. She said she would like to see all nations come together under a structure similar to the European Union "where people could be more at peace and less afraid of their neighbors."

Energetically creative, Barbara took up painting during her retirement. She organized numerous art shows featuring the works of local artists. As Artist in Residence at the Worcester Art Museum, she worked with Syrian refugees to educate the public on the Syrian war. In 2016, she helped Claire curate the Art of Peace, an exhibit for the Worcester Public Library. Claire was amazed at her extensive connections in the arts community.

Barbara's passion for peace over the

past 15 years powerfully reminds us that anyone, even those in the military and arms industry, can embrace nonviolence. She and Arthur embodied Christian personalism in their friendships with the homeless. They brought at least one particularly needful person for shelter here at Saints Francis & Thérèse Worker.

At a recent art show, Barbara donated the proceeds from sales of her gorgeous paintings, works of art that most people would find very hard to let go of, to our community and the Mustard Seed Catholic Worker. She had a contagiously generous spirit like Charles Dickens's Fezziwig, an irrepressible exuberance. She died at home cocooned in familial love, plants, paintings and musical instruments around her bed. During our last visit made the day before her passing, Arthur showed us a poem she wrote for him in her final month.

When young we meet
And recognize the spirit within
You and I

Silent moments shared, you and I
Together apparently two
But one, You and I,

Sitting together tranquil
In awe of Stars
Stretching across the Milky Way
You and I

Journeys and travels far and wide
Effort and rest
Moving
You and I

Our children laugh
Their children play
Stepping stones between generations
You and I

We
In one form here
Another in eternity
You and I. Ω

Pacifism

(Continued from Page 1)

for me to become one with God and with all of humanity in the Mystical Body of Christ sealed the deal. The Church pointed me in a direction, gave me advice on how to get there, and fuel for the journey. By age 18, the nonviolent Gospel had won my head as well as my heart.

While a sophomore at Holy Cross College, though, my Catholic pacifist idealism ran into a stone wall during a class on the theology of liberation. The Jesuit professor regarded my absolute pacifism as adolescent arrogance. I was a blue-collar kid who had never seen the things he had in Iraq, Vietnam, and Latin America. The priest felt I should show more respect for my elders.

After graduation, I struggled to put meat on the bones of my religious idealism, first as a Capuchin Franciscan novice, then as a human services worker, and for the last 32 year as a Catholic Worker. My pacifism deepened through experience in jail, war zones, inner-city houses of hospitality, and through friendship with extraordinary peacemakers.

But now that I'm 62 the tables are turned. Young anti-racism activists say I'm a pacifist old fart, relying on white privilege and unwilling to endorse throwing objects at riot police, looting, or setting fire to cars by a very small number of people at Black Lives Matter demonstrations. One critic concluded, "If the Catholic Worker generation of the 1960s cannot stand with the BLM and their tactics, it should stand aside and hand the reins to the next generation that stands with them already." Although I do stand shoulder to shoulder with Black Lives Matter activists in demonstrations, I eschew tactics that strike me as violent. Has my pacifism become as rigid as my Jesuit professor's revolutionary justice?

While I wondered about this, I heard

the reading from Luke's Gospel in which Jesus points out that he is criticized as a "glutton and drunkard." The same critics said John the Baptist "has a demon" because he was too austere. While there is a moderate path in between Jesus making gallons of wine from water and John eating locusts and wild honey, I tend to believe John and Jesus were responding faithfully in their ministries.

Then again, in a time when so many people are clinging to far-fetched ideas gleaned from the internet, I don't want to put fingers in my ears when people criticize my pacifism. As the Scripture from this morning's Mass reminds me, "**If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves.**" I must admit that I was a stuck-up college student and am now a

who stand by Christ at the Cross and go to the tomb on Easter aren't calculating the probability that all will work out. They're lovers. And lovers defy logic.

Although Jesus told us that, if we followed Him, it would be given to us, good measure, and overflowing in our lap, a lover does not view devotion as a selfish investment. Head over heels lovers don't calculate costs, but cease to prioritize self over the target of their affection.

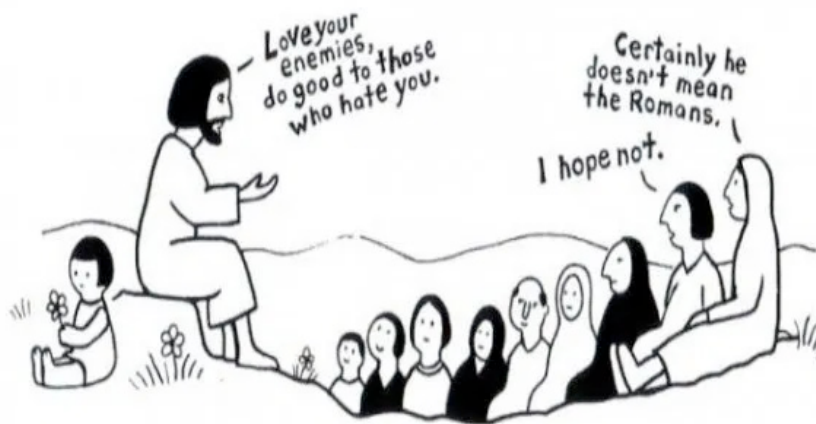
When Catholic Workers welcome back guests who previously spat on them or worse, they take an illogical risk. When anyone offers a hand to an enemy, the gesture has intrinsic value regardless of its result. When we go the extra mile or turn the other cheek, we are mystically joined with Christ in his forgiveness of

his executioners. In an ineffable way, we share his victory over violence, and plant a seed that I believe will, in God's good time, bear abundant fruit.

I will continue to point out victories of pacifists to those who believe violence is a short cut to justice, but I recognize that only a bleeding heart, a fool really, can hope to lay down their life, not only

for those who love them, but for their enemies. As Saint John of the Cross said, "In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone."

How best should I respond to police officers kneeling on the necks of unarmed people of color? I will not dictate to victims from a cozy armchair how they should respond, but I nonetheless cling to Gospel nonviolence. My heart still soars when the Benedictus is prayed every day in the Liturgy of the Hours. My imperfect faith remains drawn to its promise: "**In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace.**" Ω



stick in the mud. I must acknowledge that, to a non-Christian, my reliance on prayer and the New Testament is no better than conversing with an imaginary friend and citing Kurt Vonnegut's Book of Bokonan.

And yet, when I hear how the apostles dropped everything to follow Jesus, my heart is still drawn toward the craziness of Christ. While successful nonviolent events I've lived through or learned about make a reasonable case for pacifism, I've come to realize that my devotion to nonviolence is not the result of some kind of mathematical proof. Like Saint Thomas Aquinas, who wrote volumes to prove the existence of God, I realize that, when compared to the mystery of Divine Love, my arguments are no better than cow dung. Love based entirely on proven truth takes no risk, is cold and hard. The women





Elaine Kohner

Justice (Just is)

by Amarylis Douglas

Just another home built in a doorway,
made of a shopping cart, a tarp,
and all the damp possessions you can carry.

Just another kid in between his drug dreams,
“Will you tell them I’m OK?”
then notices we had given him a twenty.

Just two young sisters on the road, snuggling
together in that dirty, flowered comforter,
dreaming of the springtime, before the beatings.

Just another hungry guy, trying to squeeze his fingers
into a parking meter, for some forgotten change,
then into the trash can for some dinner,
a partly-smoked cigarette.

Just another mother sitting on a blanket,
holding her Baby Jesus on her lap.
A few dollars in her paper bag.

Just another Thursday evening in December.
Just another city, just another town.
Justice
(Just is.)
Some get left behind. Ω

*Editor’s Note: This poem appears in the author’s book
The Fellowship of the Rain, published in 2020 by
Blue Light Press.*

I, Too

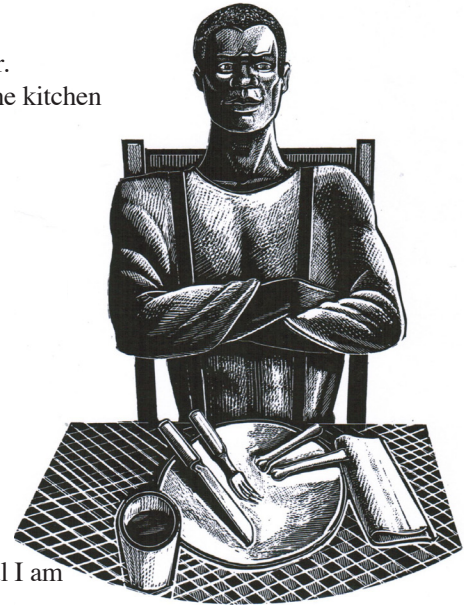
by Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I’ll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
Then.

Besides,
They’ll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America. Ω



Michael McCurdy

*Editor’s Note: This poem was first published in March 1925
in a special issue of the magazine Survey Graphic, titled “Harlem:
Mecca of the New Negro.”*

Moonflowers

by Willa Bickham



From dark deep roots
My tendrils cling
To night visions
Fragrant dreams
Weave
Through the vines
Of tender moonflowers
One night of bloom
One night of passion. Ω

*Editor’s Note: Willa Bickham and her husband Brendan were
married in December 1967 at the Washington, DC Catholic
Worker. They began Viva House, the Baltimore Catholic Worker,
in October, 1968 and are still living and working there today.*

Herod in the White House?

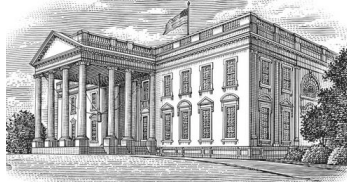
by Jim Consedine

The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the acknowledgement by the Gentile world of Jesus as the divine liberator, sent by God to proclaim the beginning of the reign of God on earth. It's a wonderful feast and wonderful news.

It's also about the role of King Herod, a man threatened by a new source of power. In an attempt to kill off a rival, Herod used deception and lies to seek out and murder more than 300 children. We commemorate this event with the Feast of Holy Innocents.

This year, the Feast of the Epiphany was the day of an attempted coup d'état by white supremacists to take over Capitol Hill in Washington, DC in a bid to prevent the transfer of power to a new administration. The whole world was watching.

There is something deeply ironic that in the USA, which purports to be a predominantly Christian nation, a direct assault on the symbolic power base should be made on with gas masks, pipe flags, fuelled by unbridled and fake news, and stoked Trump himself, attempted of this uprising are deep and on-going. The consequences will be many.



There's a reason Satan's called 'the father of lies.' When lies get preached repeatedly, they undermine confidence in truth and sow confusion. Thomas Aquinas taught that truth and justice are companions. You can't have one without the other. Injustice builds on lies, hatred inflames them. This insurrection fermented in the US for generations as inequality and alienation hit white voters. They looked for scapegoats. Distant powerbrokers in Washington became the target. It took only a match to set this explosive cocktail alight. On Epiphany, Donald Trump lit that match.

In a perverse way, the rioters have done us all a favour by exposing the American underbelly in global light. The racism, inequality and violence displayed sadly reflects a large part of US culture and history. The statistics on prisons, poverty, education and unemployment tell much of the story, but not all of it. Millions of Americans are among the most generous, kind, inclusive, and caring people in the world. They are as shocked and saddened by these events as the rest of us. It is a nation deeply divided.

It's challenging to understand how more than 80% of white evangelicals and 50% of US Catholics voted for Trump when he had such a track record of womanizing and more than 28,000 documented lies. Ideology and propaganda triumphed over faith.

It is even harder to understand how many US Catholic bishops supported Trump during his term of chaos. In choosing abortion and euthanasia as their election focus in the face of global warming, environmental challenges, widespread systemic racism, the COVID-19 pandemic, immigration, the threat of nuclear war, and poverty, the bishops played right into Trump's hands. Talk about leadership abdication! They made a mockery of their professed belief in God's love and justice for all in order to succor favour with a man who replicates a modern-day Herod.

We Christians have just celebrated the Incarnation of God into human history. For us, the birth of Jesus should be a game changer. Our hopes for the future are based on this event and on the dignity and social justice this birth brings for all – none excluded! We hold to these Gospel ideals and hopefully work to put them into practice. We follow the simple but radical command of Jesus – love your neighbor. Inclusively.

Let us pray that the United States will overcome division and emerge morally stronger, more just, more democratic in future years, that Americans will lay aside violence and follow the real Jesus, who is non-violence personified, and that inclusiveness built on justice, compassion, and mercy will heal their soul. Ω

Editor's Note: The author is a Catholic Worker and Catholic priest in New Zealand.

Letters

Dear Friends,

I'm reading Dorothy's diaries, **The Duty of Delight**, so I was delighted to find an excerpt in your newsletter! I found the article and editor's note about Atta Jabber and his plight as a Palestinian very very important. And thank you, Claire, for your *honest* report about life at the CW... Not easy! Thank you for all you do.

When I was young and a single mom (on public assistance), I would see Dorothy walking around the neighborhood, but I didn't know who she was at the time. My son was baptized at her church on the Lower East Side 50 years ago! ...I didn't really encounter the CW Movement until 1988, when I went to the Nevada Test Site and made friends with Julia at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker....

While I have many Episcopal friends, I will always remain Catholic! Thank God for Pope Francis.

Joan Monastero
Saugerties, New York

Dear Scott!

What a blessing to read the newsletter today! I was looking for books to buy and the Catholic Worker Mysteries are just the thing! But your reflection, "Why Am I Still a Catholic," struck a chord deep inside of me, and beautifully worded my own response. Thank you so much for being the Church with me, in the Communion of Saints!

Maria Rodrigues
Brighton, Massachusetts

Editors,

I am the son of a woman who grew up in the Galilee in the 1920's. Her recollections of her childhood consisted of fond memories of her neighbors: Jews, Moslems, Christians. She could not recall any problems or unpleasant incidents. Tensions did flare up in 1929, around the time my mother left. When I visited, there were only Jews living in her town, Safed. History will certainly change demographics. Later I was dismayed to learn that Christians in the Holy Land, specifically the West Bank

and Gaza have been leaving the country in alarming numbers. This is apparently due to intolerable conditions caused by an illegal occupation and unsympathetic Muslim neighbors. To use the vernacular: a double whammy. An incredible paradox has emerged. Christians find living in the homeland of Jesus Christ intolerable. How did events reach this unbelievable state of affairs? Careful analysis and thought is in order. Certain undeniable facts emerge.

Murray Watnick, MD
Enfield, Connecticut

Dear Claire,

I always read the last page [of *The Catholic Radical*] first and your last two paragraphs blew me away! Thanks for the reminder on a day when a friend's husband is dying of COVID and another friend is weighed down with what looks unfixable. You write so well, Claire. Love and thanks for being!

Rosalie Riegle
Evanston, Illinois

Hi Scott,

The latest *Radical* was a beauty. Thanks for your personal story. It may move me to write why I am no longer a Catholic. First I have to draft a letter to [US Representative] Jim McGovern about our [Quaker] Meeting's concern over persecution of LBGTQ people in Uganda and our support of Friends' Ugandan Safe Transport, an underground railroad getting them out of that country.

Thanks also for your abridgment of *Fratelli Tutti*. I have read the whole encyclical, some parts via *lectio divina*; it impressed me so much. I told a cousin that if Francis didn't have such a good job, he would be a Quaker.

Clarence Burley
Spencer, Massachusetts

Hi, Scott & Claire,

....Maybe I'm somewhat like you, Scott—I never really “leave the Church” because of the Discalced Carmelites whom I met some years before I became Roman Catholic....Except, for myself, I persist with “R.C.” in quotations. My younger sister, who became R.C., is like you—steadfast to the core. She's the only person I know who reads the Bible all through every year.... Best writing by the

Pope I've read, and neat little poem by Emma Luna.

Joan Thomas
Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Scott, Claire, and Family,

....Thank you for your always interesting newsletter. I look forward to it as a bright spot. The article by the priest regarding the atomic bombing of Japan was food for thought. My Dad was a WWII bombardier on a B-29 in the Pacific Theater whose task was largely dropping incendiary bombs on targets, mostly cities. A man with a huge heart and a soft spot for kids, I know he would have read the article with much thoughtfulness and consideration. He left this world to go on to the next in 2012. I have no doubt he's in God's loving hands.

Christine Joiner
Webster, Massachusetts

Dear Scott & Claire,

...Every article in the Dec/Jan *Catholic Radical* is profoundly inspiring. “We Are All Siblings” [excerpts from Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*] is moving in lots of ways, not least its conclusion celebrating his joint appeal for peace with the Imam. I am preaching once a month in a local Congregational Church here, and will use that appeal to remind us of God's promise to Abraham: “**in you shall all families of the earth be blessed**” (Gen. 12:3). We just need to get with the biblical program!

Also, Scott, your stirring, “Why I Am Still a Catholic” humbles us all, connects us to tradition even as we look ahead to the time we finally heed our Lord's prayer in John 17 “**that they may all be one.**”—the motto of my own United Church of Christ.

Rev. Michael Caldwell
Wolcott, Vermont

Dear Scott and Claire:

Thanks for your latest *CR*. It sat on my desk for a week waiting for the right moment for me to pick it up and savor.... Yours is one of the few newsletters/newspapers that I actually read—rather than just scan the headlines. I always find it thought and soul provoking! I loved your piece, Scott, “Why Am I Still a Catholic?,” especially the bit about when someone told Dan Berrigan, “The Catholic Church is so corrupt, I'm leaving.” He replied, “Great idea! Where are we going?” Brought a smile to my face—“to whom shall we go” indeed! You followed that with a wonderful and much appreciated testament to the goodness in the Church—excerpts from *Fratelli Tutti*.

Claire, thanks for your “Musings” about the “Old Story ever new.” And may God bless J and L and K.

John Howland, MD
Southbridge, Massachusetts

Editor's Note: The author founded a family shelter. For more information or to make a donation to this wonderful ministry please write to Saint Luke's Guesthouse, 141 Main Street Southbridge, MA 01550.

Greetings Goodman Scott and Goodwoman Claire,

I often come across years old editions and reread them. An article that comes to mind now is one Claire wrote on the proliferation of gun buying. Also, I liked Scott's article “Why I Am Still a Catholic.” A few years back, a woman wrote a book on this subject. The main thesis was that one may leave the Church, but the Church never leaves them. I am a real culture vulture and am thankful for all the fine art and classical music inspired by the Church....

Phil Brewer
Rutland, Massachusetts

Catholic Worker Calendar

February 10 — Peace Vigil to Honor Barbara Roberts: Please join us at Worcester's Lincoln Square reflecting on the life and passing of a great person. 3:30-4:30 PM, snow or rain date: February 24.

March 14— Saint Patrick's Day Sing A Long: 1-3 pm, 52 Mason Street, call 508 753-3588 for COVID and weather plans.

Mason Street Musings

Time magazine featured a recent cover entitled, “2020: Worst Year Ever.” By many measures, they may be correct, but for me personally, it was actually a pretty good year. In spite of two detached retinas requiring surgery and a broken left foot, which took twelve weeks to heal, when I kneel down to pray at Mass, I can only say, “Thank you, thank you, thank you” for all the blessings in my life.

I told Claire a couple of nights ago, after we both were grieving over our dear friend Barbara Roberts’ sudden death, that since my recovery from being struck by a car in 2019, I feel like someone who dodged death and has to use these extra innings God gave me wisely. If I have another medical emergency, folks who doted on me in the last year and a half, might say, “What? Again? Hasn’t he got something new to do? Call me when he’s better.”

But Friday night dinners by an outdoor fire behind our daughter Grace and son-in-law Anthony’s house, surrounded by the antics of our grandchildren; a family Thanksgiving dinner in our son Justin and

daughter-in-law Patricia’s open garage; and a snowy, masked Christmas caroling followed with a party, fire, and Christmas tree in our garden festooned with lights, strike me as some of the best gatherings we’ve ever hosted rather than virus-diminished ones.



Yesterday’s *Worcester Telegram* had a front page file photo of our granddaughter Frances, backed by fireworks, wearing sparkling glasses that say 2020. She, her

sister May, and brother Isaiah had attended a noontime New Year’s Eve party at Worcester’s Ecotarium. Our guest John informed us of a Scottish New Year’s celebration called Hogmonay in which a tall dark man is encouraged to be the first to cross the threshold of each house at midnight. After sharing with all of us some of the New Year’s traditions in his native Morocco, our guest Mohammed was recruited for the “first footing” role. A faithful Muslim, Mohammed helped Claire put up Christmas decorations and rescued our tree after it blew down in a storm. To support a local family-owned theater, Grace arranged it so three friends, John, Mohammed, Claire, and I could safely see a fun movie on a big screen.

Our friend Karen Pajer, inspired by our friends Nick Kanaracus and Jen Graves, convinced me to join her in an attempt to run all 2,415 streets in Worcester. In a month, we’ve already finished 518 of them. We’ve seen formidable hills, lovely neighborhoods, and broken streets which we completed by bushwhacking through woods and snow. For reasons that elude me, Karen calls me Pooh and I call her Piglet. She knitted hats and made shirts for both of us to let others know our character identities. Road races are all on hold due to the virus, but this crazy endeavor gives us both a lot of joy.

Now, Claire wants to find a way to host a virus-safe sing-a-long. If anyone can pull that off, she can.

Added to everything I’ve mentioned, we have been generously blessed with donations by many of you. We are now only \$2,000 short of what we need for our house to kick fossil fuels by Easter. What a nice way to celebrate the Resurrection!

So, I must not only say thank you to God, but to you good people. 2020 had serious trials and 2021 has already been a crazy ride too, but, with a community of family, friends, and supporters, it feels like nothing can suppress our joy. May you be carried away with sustaining joy too. Ω

Scott

SS. Francis & Thérèse Catholic Worker
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